

**AMBASSADOR FEINSTEIN'S ADDRESS TO ALUMNI OF
POLISH-JEWISH EXCHANGE PROGRAM**

FEBRUARY 14, 2010

Minister Bartoszewski, Minister Ziomecka, Minister Najder, David, Andrzej, fellow members of the diplomatic corps, esteemed guests, good evening. Dobry wieczór.

It is an honor for me to have been invited to address you and a privilege to have the opportunity to recognize your collective efforts to promote Polish-Jewish dialogue and Polish-U.S. relations.

Minister Bartoszewski, the first time we met, in your office at the Prime Minister's Chancellery, I remarked that you were a "tough act to follow." That description holds true tonight, as well. Mr. Minister, I want to thank you personally for all that you have done to promote dialogue and understanding between Catholics and Jews, Poles and Israelis, and Poles and Americans.

It is in that same spirit that Polish and American opinion leaders – those of you gathered here tonight – have participated in the AJC-Forum for Dialogue exchange program over the past 15 years.

Challenging stereotypes and working through decades of tragedy, fear, and misunderstanding is no easy task.

When I met with Andrzej Folwarczny for the first time, he spoke movingly about how he started this work. He talked about how hard it can be, in the beginning, to break down barriers and to build free and honest communication between skeptical partners.

For Andrzej, and for all of us, it is worth the effort. I know how rewarding it can be when you break through the stereotypes, and discover what brings us together.

What we share may sometimes seem superficial: Israelis born in Poland, who decades later, still miss their favorite Polish football teams. Polish Catholics who still love gefilte fish. But it all adds up to something very profound – a shared affection for our common Polish home.

President Kaczynski, Prime Minister Tusk, and Minister Bartoszewski each spoke of humanity's obligation to confront indignity and injustice two weeks ago at ceremonies marking the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Hours before, in his video remarks, President Obama he called on us to uphold the spirit of Auschwitz survivors: "not simply to bear witness, but to bear the burden of seeing our common humanity." That is what you alumni have done best – you have found the common humanity in diverse groups in Poland, Israel and the United States.

The dialogue you have created has a wider ripple effect that goes beyond communication between Catholics and Jews. Your enduring commitment to tolerance is a reminder of and reinforcement for the principles that Poles and Americans hold most dear.

These principles make a real difference. Last April, Poland led fellow EU members in boycotting Iranian President Ahmadinejad's appearance at the UN Conference on Racism because of his repeated racist remarks.

Ahmadinejad's remarks serve as a reminder that, while we have made important progress over the past two decades, there is still much that remains to be done.

As President Obama said we have an obligation to "resist anti-Semitism and ignorance in all its forms; to refuse to become bystanders to evil, whenever and wherever it rears its ugly face."

That we can – and must – do together. The U.S.-Polish relationship is based on more than just historic ties between our two countries, and family ties between Poles and Polish-Americans. It is a relationship based on a shared belief in democracy and a shared commitment to promote human rights.

By promoting dialogue and mutual understanding between Poles and American Jews, the AJC and the Forum have strengthened the broader relationship between Poland and America – you have reminded us of the things that are worth fighting for.

I thank you all for your continued leadership, your courage, and your perseverance and urge you to keep up the good work.

Dziękuję bardzo.